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SUBJECT: BULGARIAN ELECTIONS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

REFS: A) SOFIA 2949, B) SOFIA 2903, C) SOFIA 2950

SUMMARY

¶1. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF BULGARIA'S JUNE 17 ELECTIONS SHOW A COMMANDING LEAD FOR THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT SIMEON II, WITH AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT SEEMINGLY LIKELY BUT NOT YET ASSURED. THE UDF OF PM KOSTOV HAS SUFFERED A SERIOUS DEFEAT, AND HE IS EXPECTED TO RESIGN AS PARTY LEADER SHORTLY. THE SOCIALISTS AND THE ETHNIC TURKISH MRF DID SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EXPECTED. A FIFTH POLITICAL GROUPING, GERGYOV DEN-VMRO, FELL JUST SHORT OF THE NECESSARY FOUR PERCENT OF THE VOTE TO ENTER PARLIAMENT, BUT MAY REQUEST A RECOUNT. FINAL RESULTS ARE EXPECTED ON JUNE 20, BUT TALK OF POSSIBLE COALITIONS HAS ALREADY BEGUN. END SUMMARY.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

¶2. WITH OVER 99 PERCENT OF PRECINCTS REPORTING, THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT SIMEON II (NMS2), POLITICAL VEHICLE OF THE FORMER TSAR, HAS A COMMANDING LEAD IN ELECTIONS TO BULGARIA'S 240-SEAT UNICAMERAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. BALLOTS CAST ABROAD HAVE NOT YET BEEN COUNTED AND OFFICIAL RESULTS ARE NOT EXPECTED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, JUNE 20, BUT IF THESE NUMBERS HOLD UP, NMS2 WILL PROBABLY HAVE AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY (SUBJECT TO THE VAGARIES OF BULGARIA'S 31-DISTRICT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM).

¶3. PRELIMINARY RESULTS ANNOUNCED BY THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION EARLY ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 18 ARE AS FOLLOWS (A PARTY OR COALITION MUST RECEIVE 4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE NATIONWIDE TO ENTER PARLIAMENT):

PARTY	PCT.	SEATS (ESTIMATED)
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NMS2	43.05	121
UDF	18.24	51
BSP	17.35	48
MRF	6.75	20
GER-VMRO	3.67	0

¶4. BASED ON THESE FIGURES, FOUR COALITIONS ARE CERTAIN TO ENTER THE NEW PARLIAMENT: NMS2; THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FORCES (UTDDF) LED BY OUTGOING PM IVAN KOSTOV'S UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES (UDF); THE COALITION FOR BULGARIA LED BY THE BULGARIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (BSP); AND THE MRF-LIBERAL-EUROROMA COALITION LED BY THE PREDOMINANTLY ETHNIC-TURKISH MOVEMENT FOR RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS (MRF). THE FATE OF THE FIFTH COALITION, GERGYOV DEN-VMRO, AND WITH IT A POSSIBLE NMS2 OUTRIGHT MAJORITY, HANGS IN THE BALANCE.

¶5. COMMENT: THE NMS2 VICTORY WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN MORE RESOUNDING WERE IT NOT FOR VOTER CONFUSION. TWO FRINGE COALITIONS UNAFFILIATED WITH THE TSAR ADDED THE WORDS "SIMEON II" TO THEIR NAMES, AND MANAGED TO GRAB MORE THAN 5 PERCENT OF THE VOTE BETWEEN THEM (ONE CAME

WITHIN HALF A PERCENT OF ENTERING PARLIAMENT!). IN OTHER WORDS, ALMOST 50 PERCENT OF VOTERS TRIED TO CAST THEIR BALLOTS FOR SIMEON. END COMMENT.

VOTING FREE AND FAIR AT HOME, PROBLEMATIC ABROAD

¶16. THE OSCE ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION WILL HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE LATER TODAY (JUNE 18). BASED ON MEDIA ACCOUNTS AND THE REPORTS OF EMBASSY PERSONNEL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE OBSERVATION EFFORT, THERE WERE NO SERIOUS IRREGULARITIES IN BULGARIA ITSELF. COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN MADE, HOWEVER, ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF THE ELECTION ABROAD. THESE CONCERN MAINLY A LACK OF ORGANIZATION AND INSUFFICIENT QUANTITIES OF BALLOT PAPERS AT POLLING PLACES IN TURKEY, SPAIN, GERMANY AND ELSEWHERE.

HARD LOSS FOR THE UDF

¶17. THE UDF DID SOMEWHAT WORSE THAN EXPECTED, AND CAME PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO FALLING PAST THE BSP INTO THIRD PLACE OVERALL. NMS2 BEAT UDF IN EVERY REGION, INCLUDING THE PARTY'S TRADITIONAL STRONGHOLDS SOFIA AND PLOVDIV. TO MAKE THE PILL EVEN MORE BITTER FOR PM KOSTOV, UDF TOOK SECOND PLACE IN ONLY 11 OF BULGARIA'S 31 ELECTORAL REGIONS, AND WAS BEATEN INTO FOURTH PLACE IN THREE OF THEM: SILISTRA, TARGOVISHTA AND SHUMEN. THE BOTTOM LINE: FOUR YEARS AGO THE UDF COALITION WON 125 SEATS IN PARLIAMENT; NOW IT WILL HAVE 51.

¶18. KOSTOV CONCEDED DEFEAT AND IS EXPECTED TO TENDER HIS RESIGNATION AS PARTY LEADER SHORTLY, ALTHOUGH HE MAY WELL STAND FOR THAT POST AGAIN. IN CONGRATULATING SIMEON, KOSTOV SAID HE EXPECTS NMS2 TO CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT NECESSARY BUT PAINFUL REFORMS INITIATED BY HIS ADMINISTRATION. BECAUSE OF THESE REFORMS, KOSTOV CONCLUDED, THE UDF LOST THE CONFIDENCE OF VOTERS BUT BULGARIA WON THE CONFIDENCE OF THE WORLD: "WE BUILT AN INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, AND A GOOD BASIS FOR EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION."

MRF BOUNCES BACK; GERGOVDEN-VMRO IN LIMBO

¶19. THE MAINLY ETHNIC TURKISH MRF BOUNCED BACK STRONGLY IN THE LATTER STAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN, AND DID BETTER THAN MOST POLLSTERS HAD EXPECTED. IN FACT, THE MRF WAS THE ONLY PARTY TO DO BETTER THAN NMS2 IN ANY REGION: IT WON A MAJORITY IN KURDZHALI AND A PLURALITY IN RAZGRAD, BOTH DISTRICTS WITH LARGE ETHNIC TURKISH POPULATIONS AND IN WHICH NMS2 DID NOT CAMPAIGN ACTIVELY. IT APPEARS THERE WAS VERY HEAVY VOTING IN TURKEY AS WELL, WITH PEOPLE STANDING IN LINE AS LONG AS SIX HOURS AT POLLING STATIONS IN ISTANBUL AND ELSEWHERE, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS.

¶10. PENDING THE RELEASE OF FINAL RESULTS, THE COALITION OF TWO MILDLY NATIONALIST FORMATIONS -- THE GERGOVDEN MOVEMENT AND THE INTERNAL MACEDONIAN REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION (VMRO) -- REMAINS IN LIMBO. EARLY RETURNS SHOWED THEM ABOVE THE FOUR PERCENT THRESHOLD FOR ENTRY TO PARLIAMENT, BUT BY EARLY MONDAY MORNING IT APPEARED THEY HAD FALLEN OUT OF CONTENTION. GERGOVDEN LEADER LYUBEN DILOV JR. SUGGESTED HE MIGHT DEMAND A HAND RECOUNT. IF THE RESULTS STAND AND GERGOVDEN-VMRO DOES NOT GET INTO PARLIAMENT, AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY FOR NMS2 APPEARS LIKELY.

¶11. COMMENT: THE MRF, FOR ITS PART, CLAWED ITS WAY BACK FROM THE EDGE OF POLITICAL OBLIVION, AND PARTY LEADER AHMED DOGAN MUST BE BREATHING A SIGH OF RELIEF AND RELISHING THE PROSPECT OF THUMBING HIS NOSE AT KOSTOV FROM A LIKELY POSITION INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT.

GERGYOV DEN-VMRO, MEANWHILE, IF IT FAILS TO REACH FOUR PERCENT, WILL PROBABLY SPLIT INTO ITS CONSTITUENT PARTS. VMRO -- WITH A LONG HISTORY, COHERENT IDEOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION ON SEVERAL MUNICIPAL COUNCILS -- WILL PROBABLY SOLDIER ON AT THE FRINGES OF POWER. GERGYOV DEN -- A MUCH LOOSER FORMATION THAT COUNTED ON THE PROTEST VOTE SUBSEQUENTLY VACUUMED UP BY SIMEON -- IS MORE LIKELY TO FADE SLOWLY AWAY. END COMMENT.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

¶12. UNDER THE BULGARIAN CONSTITUTION, THE NEW PARLIAMENT MUST ASSEMBLE WITHIN ONE MONTH. PRESIDENT STOYANOV IS OBLIGED TO OFFER THE NMS2, AS TOP VOTE-GETTER, THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT. SPOKESMEN FOR SIMEON SAY THE TSAR HAS NOT DECIDED WHETHER TO SEEK THE POST OF PRIME MINISTER. THE NMS2 LEADER IN PLOVDIV AND POSSIBLE FUTURE FINANCE MINISTER MILEN VELCHEV SAID NMS2 WILL SEEK A BROAD COALITION WITH PARTIES THAT CAN SUPPORT THE FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF THE TSAR'S PROGRAM (REF A), BUT WILL NOT WORK WITH "CORRUPT OR DISCREDITED" INDIVIDUALS. HE AND OTHER NMS2 REPRESENTATIVES STRESSED THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL PURSUE CONTINUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU AND NATO AND STABILITY IN THE BALKANS.

¶13. SERIOUS COALITION NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNLIKELY UNTIL FINAL ELECTION RESULTS ARE ANNOUNCED, PROBABLY ON JUNE 20. IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, FEELERS ARE ALREADY OUT. JUST DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTION, KOSTOV DECLARED THAT HE WOULD NOT ACCEPT A COALITION WITH NMS2. AS THE RESULTS CAME IN SUNDAY NIGHT, HOWEVER, OTHER PARTY LEADERS LEFT THE DOOR OPEN. UDF GENERAL SECRETARY EKATERINA MIKHAILOVA SAID THE UDF IS WILLING TO TALK ABOUT A COALITION WITH THE NMS2 IF THE LATTER INITIATES THE DISCUSSION, AND PROVIDED THAT SUCH A COALITION DOES NOT INCLUDE THE BSP. FOR THEIR PARTS, THE LEADERS OF BOTH THE BSP AND MRF SAID THEY ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS A COALITION WITH NMS2.

COMMENT

¶14. WITH RESULTS STILL UNOFFICIAL AND A TSARIST MAJORITY NOT YET CERTAIN, THE ONLY THING THAT CAN BE SAFELY SAID ABOUT THE NEXT BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT IS THAT IT WILL BE DOMINATED BY THE NMS2. REFTELS ADDRESS THE STATED PRIORITIES OF THE MOVEMENT (FOREIGN POLICY CONTINUITY, ACCELERATED ECONOMIC REFORM AND MORE ATTENTION TO SOCIAL NEEDS) AND THE DIFFICULTIES IT IS LIKELY TO FACE IN PURSUING THEM. AS NOTED IN REF B, AND REITERATED BY NMS2 REPRESENTATIVES AS THE RESULTS CAME IN, THERE ARE NO PLANS TO SEEK A RESTORATION OF THE MONARCHY (AT LEAST FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE).

¶15. AS FOR THE OTHER PARTIES, THEY MUST LICK THEIR WOUNDS AND AWAIT A CALL FROM SIMEON. THIS WAS A HUMILIATING DEFEAT FOR THE UDF, AND KOSTOV IS ALL BUT CERTAIN TO OFFER HIS RESIGNATION, BUT HIS RETURN TO THE HELM OF THE PARTY CANNOT BE RULED OUT. MUCH MAY DEPEND ON HOW MUCH NMS2 WOULD BE PREPARED TO OFFER THE UDF TO BRING IT INTO A NEW GOVERNMENT (OR AT LEAST SECURE ITS SUPPORT ON KEY ITEMS OF SIMEON'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA).

¶16. THE SOCIALISTS DID SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EXPECTED, WHICH SHOULD BOLSTER THE POSITION OF THEIR REFORMIST CHAIRMAN GEORGI PURVANOV. BUT THEY REMAINED BEHIND THE UDF, THE PARTY'S UNRECONSTRUCTED LEFT IS ALREADY CALLING FOR PURVANOV'S HEAD, AND THE PARTY COULD SPLIT. STILL, FEW IN THE BSP EXPECTED TO WIN THE ELECTION, AND THEY CAN TAKE SOLACE IN THE FACT THAT SIMEON ACHIEVED THEIR MAIN OBJECTIVE FOR THEM: REMOVING KOSTOV AND COMPANY FROM POWER. WHILE AN NMS2-BSP COALITION IS UNLIKELY, THE SOCIALISTS MAY STILL FIND COMMON GROUND

WITH SIMEON ON ISSUES SUCH AS WAGE AND PENSION INCREASES, WHILE WORKING TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS THE MOST CREDIBLE OPPOSITION PARTY. (IN THAT CONNECTION, A SECONDARY RESULT OF THESE ELECTIONS IS THAT THE BSP FINDS ITSELF, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, WITH NO SERIOUS COMPETITION ON THE POLITICAL LEFT: THE BULGARIAN EURO-LEFT PARTY, WHICH HAD HOPED TO EMERGE AS A SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE BSP, GOT JUST ONE PERCENT AND ITS LEADER, ALEXANDER TOMOV, PROMPTLY RESIGNED).

MILES